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# THE PROOFS OF THE IMMORTALITY OF THE HUMAN SOUL IN THE LIGHT OF SPECULATIVE PHILOSOPHY.

BY CARL FRIEDRICH GOESCHEL.

Translated from the German by T. R. VICKROY. (1st Ed., 1835, Berlin).

## INTRODUCTION.

For many centuries the human understanding has diligently sought to establish scientifically the doctrine of the *Existence of God*. Hitherto, however, it has found only *three* proofs, which cannot produce a true conviction unless the mind is already convinced, or some additional proofs are adduced. It is proper however to qualify this statement, since to these *three* proofs, called *philosophical* proofs, a *fourth*, namely, the *historical* proof, is to be added.

So it is with the proofs for the *immortality* of the human soul, which, like the proofs for the existence of God, have been called in question through the Kantian Critique, and hence require re-examination. It has not yet become quite clear however, just in what precise manner the so-called proofs for the persistence of the human soul stand in all respects in *analogical* relation to the proofs for the existence of God. The two classes of proofs are still in opposition the one to the other, being mutually exclusive: in order that they may appear in their connection, the one must be interpreted in the light of the other. It is worth our while to understand them more thoroughly, and hence it is especially necessary that we become conscious of the trichotomy in the proofs for the immortality of the human soul, which formerly as well as now is demanded externally and historically in the proofs for the existence of God.

In the next place we have however to remark that here too the historical proof is to be added; for under the consensus gentium is to be understood the majority (*οἱ πολλοὶ*); not all men individually, but the greater part of mankind. For example, the materialists count as little in regard to immortality as the atheists do in regard to the divine existence. The Atomists, Democritus and Epicurus, the one having lived before and the other after Anaxagoras, are outvoted, for Anaxagoras has penetrated to the

idea of *Spirit*. And Titus Lucretius Carus, in his enthusiasm for death, in his resignation to the soothing negation of restless life, in his zeal against all being and life and their tedious immortalities, valiantly sings his immortal "Hymn to Nature," which as the culmination of materialism, has been aptly called the prologue to Christianity; nevertheless, as Goethe says, he is like a certain field marshal, who, full of rage, at a critical moment in the battle, cried out to his retreating soldiers; "Ye dogs, do you want to live forever"? But the latter did not on this account throw their lives away. If now such Roman hero voices must themselves die away amid the preponderating multitude, how much more the voice of a weak, angry, trembling stammerer? The Roman stands yet at least undaunted at the fire, like Mucius Scævola, and lets his best part, his right hand, complacently burn. He calmly trusts to the quiet of the dead; he despises the pain and tumult of life, of which the selfish *Ego* is the sting, and he knows no other hope. Hence he is exalted by his conviction, and who can misunderstand the truth which herein lies hidden? If he cannot outvote us, how much less can Pliny the Elder, who, in spite of all his meritorious learning, through the openness of his gross sensual materialism, with his almost passionate scorn against the immortality of the soul *above* and the body *under* the light earth, himself becomes an object of sport; neither can we be outvoted by La Mettrie, who himself trembles before that death, which as materialist he must teach!

In order to learn the materialism in which mankind is unsuspectingly involved, although they allow it also again to be overcome by a stronger faith in spirit—in order to learn it in its noble naturalness and ingenuousness, it is worth while *en passant* to read the apostrophe of Pliny against the puerilia delinimenta, which in the original, favor immortality. The argument itself is just as puerile as the representation that he makes of the object which he confutes. He asks, "For what then is the soul without eyes and ears to be used, if she can neither taste nor smell? and where finally shall room be found for so many shades?" Not less worthy of remark is La Mettrie's relation to his own doctrine: he himself confesses that his doctrine is unable to elevate him above the fear of death. He says: "I confess to myself that all my philosophy cannot keep me from regarding death as the direst necessity of nature; hence I would forever destroy the afflicting idea." Truly it is even nature,

which, in its individualization, in its separation from the idea, does not satisfy the spirit !

It is not at all strange that the majority have recoiled from materialism and at all times have turned away from it, and through matter have gained intimations of spirit ! This majority desire never to lay aside mortality (*avida nunquam desinere mortalitas*) : the mortality never sated of life, which, with all its childish conceptions, in the end anticipates the truth and wrests the victory from it. And what else is that shudder in the presence of the dead, with which also the consciousness of the soul of unconscious nature shall expire,—what else is this than the outer witness that death is incompatible with the nature of man? and the essence of man is his inner nature, the soul. Upon this also rests the universal voice which protests against the death of the soul.

History attributes the teaching of the doctrine of immortality to various persons. Eusebius says that Moses, through the traditional lore which he had mastered, was the first to propound this grand doctrine. Herodotus attributed it to the Egyptians ; Pausanias to the Chaldeans and Magi of India. Diogenes Laertius imputes it to Thales, while Cicero says that Pherecydes, a pupil of Thales, and others say that Pythagoras, a pupil of Pherecydes, was the first who taught and published the doctrine of the immortality of the soul. Be this as it may, there is no doubt that a direct conviction, presentiment, emotion or faith, as a remaining heavenly spark of life in each man, has always preceded this doctrine of the understanding. For the soul feels herself immortal, whether she can prove it or not ; just as soon as the soul awakes from her unconscious natural life, she feels immortality stirring within her ; faith, hope and thought awake with consciousness. According to Hegel, and he too is one who is no longer here,\* the pyramids and mummies of Egypt are contributions to the historical argument for the immortality of the human soul. They are memorials of a belief in personal persistence—symbols which make perceptible to the senses outwardly the inner truth, the perpetuity of spirit. In a symbolic manner they preserve the body as the tenantless house of the soul, just as the soul in herself, as in her own house, is kept and preserved. It is the *spirit* of man himself, which seeks to snatch away the body

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\*Hegel died shortly previous to this, in 1831.—[Ed.]

as its organ, from the power of nature even after death, and herewith in nature itself proves the dominion of spirit over nature. All funeral ceremonies, all care of the dead, likewise testify to a belief in immortality, since thereby the body, even in its exanimated condition, is honored "as the precious casket of the spirit."

So mighty is this truth in its immediateness that it keeps itself undecayed under manifold decompositions, while philosophers and anti-philosophers, in overwhelming majority, adopt it in all times. Even Peter Pomponatius, although he had threaded every labyrinth of doubt, and, according to Aristotelian principles had methodically proved their indemonstrability, with all his numerous predecessors and followers, must nevertheless believe it. And Plotinus, who himself cannot think any personality, any self-consciousness in the Godhead Himself, nevertheless, according to Platonic principles, is compelled to prove the persistence of self-consciousness in man, in which in the highest degree he vindicates in man what he could not discern in the Godhead Himself. His last words were, "Try to follow up the divine in us to the divine in all." (*πειράσθω τὸ ἐν ἡμῖν θεῖον ἀνάγειν πρὸς τὸ ἐν τῷ παντί θεῖον*): his meaning was not to *descend* but to rise into the All.

Even in our time the historical proof remains unimpaired, however much it is daily torn asunder. How shocking it is to learn of a certain sect in New York, who have at once renounced theoretically and practically, the Godhead, morality, and immortality! For if it truly follows that in giving up one truth, all truths are abandoned, how shocking it is that man can endure this consequence in untruth! and it is even more deplorable to think that this sect has for its author, the tenderest and most susceptible part of humanity, namely a woman, an English woman, a Miss Wright. But admitting that it is true that of the 200,000 souls in New York, 20,000 confess a belief in such a horrible nihilism, who would therefore gainsay reason, since there are so many lunatic asylums? And of these 20,000 deathless souls, will there then no one be converted from the death of the soul to the life of the spirit?\*

So much for the historical proof of immortality. It rests upon the universal conviction which obtrudes itself immediately upon

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\*Such is the impression made in 1834 by an account of the doings of Frances Wright (D'Arusmont) in this country in (1825).—ED.

the human spirit, whose footprints may be closely followed through all times and among all nations. To this proof even Cicero appealed, because it had descended from antiquity. He says: "For antiquity which was nearer to the beginning and the divine race, perhaps discerned this better than they perceived those things which were right." The immediateness of the conviction gives it this weight. "As we know by reason that the gods are by nature what we suppose they are, so by the consent of all nations we perceive that souls persist: where they remain and what they are is to be learned by reason."

According to this the conviction is extended to time as well as to place; it rests upon its immediacy; on the other hand, it is reason which helps forward this common sense. Yet weightier than the history of the historical proofs, is thus far the history of the philosophy of the immortality of the soul, which attaches itself immediately to the historical proof, and to the democratic element of this proof adds the aristocratic element. This is the moment to which we here direct our attention. The third moment might be called the monarchical, which in this case is the first, for it is what is laid down in divine revelation, and will be furnished throughout all time. While this immediate revelation continually unfolds itself, it comes to pass that it produces the true faith, which, as a living principle, produces the democratic and aristocratic moments, purifying and making them fruitful.

But we abide by the philosophical doctrine of immortality. And here it is first of all the history, again, which we must first examine. As a true history of philosophy, such a history must at the same time be a philosophy of this history. But there are yet many things wanting before we can attain to it. Even the most deserving works of this kind contain only scanty preparations and insufficient materials. It were necessary to go back everywhere to the fountain itself, to the one next the stream which it forms, in order to be able to follow it thoroughly in its course through all its meanderings.

In the next place, it might be necessary to find out the chief current in this stream of intermingling proofs, and to hunt up the chief proof in which all other ideas are concentrated, in their difference as well as in their connection. These chief proofs of a preceding philosophy should be capable of becoming valid as the outlines of a future history of the doctrine of immortality:

but they should also be vouchsafed a definite basis (Haltpunkt), in which also the present stand point of speculative philosophy in relation to immortality may be unfolded, in order to be able in this to view in a new light the underlying forms of proof.

Hence our first step might be to seek to understand these proofs in their connected organism, to unfold them one after another in their characteristics, and to hunt up in the history of philosophy her traditional proofs for the persistence of the human soul. The second step might be, that we add to this first step the results of speculative philosophy in our time, and in thought further to unfold and challenge them, but at all events we should endeavor to derive principles out of speculative philosophy and a method in accordance with this lofty science. The third step should be that, enriched by this intellectual vision and endowed with a newly acquired insight, we should look back upon the preceding steps of human investigation, so that in conclusion we may give an account of the factors and of their result.

But there is yet at the very threshold another consideration which confronts us for which the statement itself contains the cause. Wherefore is a more painstaking mediation needed, if the truth is given to us in advance without mediation? Why do we need to seek after a truth in the possession of which we already find ourselves? What does the historical inquiry about the refinements of other seekers profit us in the end, if the history, the immediate conviction of the happy who have found the jewel without seeking, descends to us through all time?

In human life and thought there are not seldom moments in which wonder seizes us that man will take such great pains to prove himself and his Author, as if the seeking and the sought must not both already be present in order to become the seeking and the sought. Who does not know the heights of conscious emotion in which moments nothing is so certain to man as the existence or presence of the Eternal God, in whom he knows himself secured and sheltered? And yet we must then again confess, that we do not yet truly know aright how we are with God and ourselves, until after that we take a view of ourselves. With David we soon find God everywhere: "Whither shall I go from thy spirit or whither shall I flee from thy presence." (Ps. cxxxix :7). And with Job we soon find him nowhere: "Behold I go forward, but he is not there, and backward, but I cannot perceive him."

(Job xxxii :8). If we are not always certain of God, how can we at all times be certain of ourselves? In relation to ourselves, nothing exercises us more than death, the world to come, and futurity. Oftentimes the feeling seems to rise to an inner experience, the representation to a conception, but before we can seize it, the wings of the soul again grow weary and sink, as if they could not sustain themselves at so great a height.

Among the sketches of Moritz Retzsch, there is one, called "Pegasus in the Yoke," in which the hippogriff, loosed from the yoke at command of a heavenly youth, tears itself away from the earth, and as a spirit, as a god, mounts into the blue depths above, and, before the sight can follow it, sweeps away and disappears; so that, although we may be affected by the sight, yet we can scarcely refrain from laughing, as soon as we let our glance descend to the farmer who, in spite of its useless wings, had invested his cash in the animal, and no longer doubting looks gaping after the wonderful animal, as it does not go forward in the right way. It is not to be misapprehended that to man, unmindful of his immortal soul, under the clogs of the body, all presentiment seems to depart from the sphere to which the winged horse has departed, in which it finds its native element, and for the first time again in freedom, breathes afresh. If it falls, will it not be dashed to pieces, or if it flies ever higher and higher, being freed from all weight, will it not melt in illimitable space and finally be completely volatilized? However much we may laugh, we are all very closely related to this honest husbandman, who represents the naivest immediateness, and, like a raw recruit, holds this clod or matter generally for the main point, for the condition of all being and life, for the ground and base of all reality. First of all we are also almost in the same condition as this farmer was, when we stand at a deathbed and must witness how the soul frees herself from the yoke, the body, and unseen disappears. We might station sentinels to watch when, how or where she really comes out and whither she goes, or whether she departs at all, or at the same time goes down with the body. At least Mephistopheles must confess that the thing has its difficulties :

"From day to day when? where? and how?  
Enstamps dull care upon my brow;  
So much the if absorbs my thought  
That death's fell power is brought to nought."



In this manner the end leads to the beginning. Each man goes to meet it, and looks back to another; so it seems that man, although he may stand in the midst of life and thought, begins anew to learn God and himself thoroughly where possible. So it is also explained why man, in accordance with his middle place, seeks the proof to what already is, what he has and what he feels, and, in this doctrine, must ever undertake the problem anew.

Then many a day one teacheth you  
 What at a single stroke ye do:  
 How each to eat and drink is free  
 And needful still is one! two! three!

Finally, the more present, the more assured the immediate certainty which precedes the mediated cognitions, proofs and apprehensions is, the more vivid will they be; the more lively the certainty is, the more will the indwelling life, as the life of the spirit, show itself in mediated thought. For the true life of immediate conviction consists even in this onward movement to mediation, which is thought. Immediate faith itself, in which feeling comes to its own content, and finds also the name for the thing which is given to man, that it should be happy in him, consists essentially in this, that he grows in knowledge and in thinking he progresses and mediates himself more and more. Like David the Christian must groan first to become a child in Christ and then a man, to die with Christ first in order afterward to live with Him.

*Remark by the Editor.*—The foregoing is the introduction to the treatise on human immortality by Goeschel, (1781—1860) perhaps the most enlightened of Hegel's disciples. It is supposed that Goeschel is the one exception that Hegel made to his general statement that none of his disciples understood him. It is related that Hegel always met Goeschel "with a warm pressure of the hand."

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## DOES THE MIND EVER SLEEP?

BY E. M. CHESLEY.

### 1. What is mind?

Mind may possibly be regarded as having been gradually evolved by and through the countless forces and instrumentalities